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## Customers Ignore Obstacles to Buy Books in Moscow

MOSCOW (Reuters) — While official figures show that a fourth of the world's books are published in the Soviet Union, Russians say that when trying to buy the volumes they want they meet with difficulties unmatched anywhere.

Moscow has over 200 bookshops, which last year sold an average of 17 books for every one of the 6,500,000 persons in the capital. These figures were reached despite the unattractiveness of the bookshops and the lack of help.

Almost without exception, shops guard their books behind counters on which only a few samples are displayed. Behind the counters, shelves rise from floor to ceiling challenging even the most sharp-eyed customers.

The shops are generally poorly lighted and the clerks are rarely well-informed about the

stock. The average Soviet shop clerk's overt indifference to customers seems many times magnified in bookstores.

Books are bought back from the public at approximately 20 per cent less than their original price, and are re-sold as new.

In these shops, even more than others, the eager buyer always feels that the very book he is looking for is hidden under a pile of others stacked up on the floor, but he is hardly likely to be allowed behind the counter to browse through them.

The principle on which book shops work, according to one assistant, is: "the customer ought to know what he wants before he comes in."

This is a virtual impossibility. New books are not advertised, and although they are reviewed in the monthly literary journals, this is normally many months after they have appeared and been sold out.

A weekly newspaper called Book Reviews is published, but within hours of its appearance, it becomes as rare as some of the books mentioned in it.